

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 26486

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF, TH

SUBJECT: INDOCHINESE BOAT CASES

SUMMARY: EMBASSY REMAINS CONCERNED ABOUT THAI AND OTHER COUNTRIES' RECEPTION OF BOAT CASES AND WONDERS WHETHER SOME FURTHER ACTION MIGHT BE TAKEN, POSSIBLY IN NEW YORK, TO HELP IN RESOLVING THIS DIFFICULT ISSUE. END SUMMARY:

1. ASA BOONYAPRATAUNG, MFA ACTING DIRGEN OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS DEPARTMENT, CALLED IN UNHCR BANGKOK REPRESENTATIVE BERTA SEPTEMBER 21 TO DISCUSS PROBLEM OF BOAT CASES. AS UNHCR CONVEYED SUBSTANCE OF CONVERSATION TO US, BASIC POINT WAS THAT RTG REJECTS UNHCR APPEAL TO ADHERE TO PRINCIPLE OF FIRST ASYLUM. PRIMARY REASONS WERE THAT THESE NEW REFUGEES ONLY ADD TO THAILAND'S ALREADY LARGE REFUGEE POPULATION (72,000 PERSONS WHO ARRIVED SINCE APRIL, 1975, ARE CURRENTLY REGISTERED AS PRESENT IN THAILAND), AND ACCEPTANCE
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OF BOAT CASES WOULD SERVE TO ATTRACT ADDITIONAL PEOPLE FROM

VIET-NAM. RTG SEES MANY PEOPLE ARRIVING AND ONLY A FEW BEING MOVED OUT TO THIRD COUNTRIES, AND THOSE PRIMARILY BY THE FRENCH AND DUTCH. THAI U OW THAT U.S. IS, ESSENTIALLY, OUT OF THE REFUGEE BUSINESS. ASA TOLD BERTA THAT RTG IS SUFFICIENTLY FLEXIBLE IN ITS DECISION ON FIRST ASYLUM TO ALLOW TEMPORARY ASYLUM TO THOSE REFUGEES WHOSE EVENTUAL DEPARTURE COULD BE GUARANTEED BY UNHCR OR AN EMBASSY.

2. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN IN WHAT MANNER RTG WILL IMPLEMENT THIS DECISION. THERE ARE NOW APPROXIMATELY 740 REFUGEES WHO ARRIVED BY BOAT (BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER JUNE 30), HERE, OF WHOM 186 HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED BUT NOT MOVED BY EITHER THE USG OR THIRD COUNTRIES. AN ADDITIONAL 142 PEOPLE HAVE APPLICATIONS PENDING WITH THE U.S. THERE ARE NO IMMEDIATE INDICATIONS THAT THESE REFUGEES WILL BE AFFECTED BY CHANGE IN THAI POLICY, I.E. WILL FACE DEPORTATION. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT IS CERTAINLY POSSIBLE THAT THE NEXT BOAT TO ARRIVE WILL BE TOWED BACK OUT TO SEA, IN THE MANNER OF THE CAMBODIAN BOATLOAD OF 35 REFUGEES TWO WEEKS AGO IN SONGKHLA. THEN THE SAGA COULD BEGIN, WITH LANDINGS REFUSED AROUND THE GULF OF THAILAND, MALAYSIA, SINGAPORE, INDONESIA, TO THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES.

3. THE RTG ASKS A SIMPLE QUESTION: WHY SHOULD IT HAVE A POLICY OF ACCEPTING BOAT CASES, WHEREAS THE OTHER COUNTRIES IN THE IMMEDIATE AREA ARE DENYING ASYLUM? IT POINTS OUT THAT THERE IS A CONTINUING FLOW OF 500-1,000 NEW REFUGEES PER MONTH FROM LAOS AND CAMBODIA, AND IT RECOGNIZES A CERTAIN RESPONSIBILITY FOR THESE PEOPLE BECAUSE THEY COME FROM COUNTRIES BORDERING ON THAILAND. HOWEVER, EXCEPT FOR THE FRENCH, NO THIRD COUNTRIES ARE SERIOUSLY THINKING ABOUT TAKING ANY SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF THESE PEOPLE. MEANWHILE, ALL INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION IS FOCUSED ON THE BOAT PROBLEM, AND NOT MUCH IS HAPPENING.

4. NOW THAT THE THAI DOOR DEFINITELY APPEARS TO BE CLOSING, THE NEED FOR AN EVEN TEMPORARY SOLUTION IS MORE CRITICAL. FOREIGN MINISTER PHICHAI RATTAKUN MET WITH UNHCR SADRUDIN AGA KHAN EARLIER THIS WEEK AND WILL BE IN NEW YORK TO ATTEND UNGA SEPTEMBER 23. EMBASSY WONDERS WHETHER THIS MIGHT NOT BE CONFIDENTIAL

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BE AN OPPORTUNE TIME TO HAVE A MEETING IN NEW ORK OF REPRESENTATIVES OF ALL COUNTRIES CONCERNED WITH THE PROBLEM IN ORDER TO FIGURE OUT WHERE TO GO FROM HERE.

5. A COMMENT MADE BY THE VICE-GOVERNOR OF SONGKHLA PROVINCE AT THE TIME OF THE DEPORTATION OF THE BOATLOAD OF CAMBODIAN REFUGEES MAY BE WORTH REPEATING AS REPRESENTATIVE OF CURRENT MINISTRY OF INTERIOR AND MILITARY POLICY

ON BOATS. " IF THE BOAT CA COME, THE BOAT CAN GO", THE
OFFICIAL SAID.
BURKE

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